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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 GABORONE 000581

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SUBJECT: CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN BOTSWANA

REF: GABORONE 478

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES LOIS A. AROIAN FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (SBU) Summary: As the Botswana Defence Force (BDF) prepares to mark thirty years of professional, apolitical service to the nation, its leadership has recognized the need to improve civil-military relations. While the BDF's streamlined relationship with the executive branch has facilitated quick mobilization, as in the 1998 peacekeeping operation in Lesotho, parliament and the public have been left relatively in the dark. Excessive secrecy regarding the military, the contingent of retired army officers in the senior ranks of the ruling political party, and perceptions of corruption strain the BDF's relationship with the public. Mission has sought to use the recent emergence of civil society institutions focused on security issues to support the evolution of a more effective interface between civilians and the military. End summary.

CIVILIAN CONTROL EFFICIENT BUT NOT ELABORATE

¶2. (U) Civilian oversight of the military is efficient, if not elaborate, in Botswana. The Botswana Defence Force (BDF) falls under the authority of the Minister of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration - Botswana has no ministry of defense. A defense council, appointed by the president and currently consisting of the BDF's four senior-most officers, four cabinet members, an MP, and a handful of senior civil servants, advises the President on the administration of the military. Significantly, the National Assembly exercises very little oversight of the military. The parliamentary committee on foreign affairs, trade and security, for example, does not have the power to hold hearings at which it can question military leaders on their policies and practices. Indeed, the President is not required to consult parliament at all regarding deployment of the BDF outside Botswana's borders and, in fact, he did not do so prior to the 1998 mission to Lesotho.

¶3. (U) The President -- who is chosen by the majority party in the National Assembly rather than by popular election -- holds exceptional personal control over the military. The Constitution gives the President the power to determine the operational use of the military without reference to the National Assembly, and grants similarly unfettered authority to appoint, promote, assign or dismiss military personnel. The Constitution allows the President to delegate those powers, but only to members of the armed forces. There are also constitutional provisions for emergency rule by the President.

BDF CLOAKED IN EXCESSIVE SECRECY

¶4. (U) In public remarks made April 7, 2006, Lt. Gen. Louis

Fisher, commander of the BDF, cited a communication gap between the BDF and the public as his biggest challenge. Fisher admitted that the military has a tendency to excessive secrecy, which ultimately can jeopardize its support in parliament and among the public. For example, although the BDF's budget is vetted by the Ministry of Finance, the Cabinet and the Minister for Presidential Affairs, the National Assembly is presented with only a grand total and no details on how the money will be spent. (The parliamentary accounts committee does get to question the commander of the BDF based on the auditor general's annual report at the end of the fiscal year, but its role is limited to reviewing past spending as represented in that unclassified, public report.)

Most of the BDF's budget, Fisher stated, need not be classified. He also announced his intention to establish an office of civil-military relations that would develop and implement a communication strategy.

RUMORS OF CORRUPTION SURROUND BDF PROCUREMENT

15. (SBU) That lack of transparency, particularly concerning financial matters, has led to the proliferation of rumors concerning corruption in BDF procurement. When Vice President Ian Khama was still commander of the BDF, for example, companies owned by his brothers won contracts to supply meals and vehicles to the military. Aside from presenting a clear conflict of interest, civilian and military contacts alike have suggested that normal practices were subverted in these deals. A similar incident reportedly involved a contract awarded to the family of former Minister of Presidential Affairs Daniel Kwelagobe. Ken Good, the former University of Botswana Professor ejected from the country in May 2005, had highlighted these incidents

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in his academic papers. The BDF is not exempt from the general increase in the perception of corruption in Botswana.

HOW APOLITICAL IS THE BDF?

16. (U) In its twenty-nine years of existence, the BDF has neither interfered in politics nor threatened to do so. Nonetheless, an apparent trend has emerged connecting the BDF and the BDP. Both of the BDF's former commanders are now cabinet members -- Minister of Foreign Affairs Meraphe and Vice President Khama. Another retired general oversees the national police service as Minister for Labor and Home Affairs, and two other cabinet members are also former BDF officers. By contrast, none of the thirteen opposition MPs is a military veteran.

17. (SBU) In a departure from the BDF's general practice of avoiding partisan remarks, Lt. Gen. Fisher demonstrated a clear bias in favor of the ruling party during his April 7 remarks cited above. Speaking to a seminar on civil-military relations, Fisher quoted from a recent BDP manifesto to outline that party's perspective on defense and security. He then quoted from a dated manifesto of the Botswana National Front (the largest opposition party), which articulated policies that the BNF has long since abandoned. Fisher then went on to read quotations from the parliamentary debate following the deployment to Lesotho in 1998 in which ruling party MPs mocked and castigated the opposition MPs for questioning the manner in which the deployment occurred. Given Fisher's impending retirement in November, his comments might simply have reflected a desire to curry favor with the politicians in order to secure an ambassadorship or other appointment thereafter. Nonetheless, they suggested an official partisan preference.

18. (U) Despite an apparent affinity for the BDP within the leadership of the BDF and the opposition parties' advocacy for reduced military expenditure, the BNF has performed well

in electoral constituencies heavily populated by soldiers. In 1994, for instance, the BNF won a parliamentary seat from Mogoditshane, where the largest BDF camp is located. (It lost in 1999 and 2004, however, due largely to splitting the opposition vote with the smaller Botswana Congress Party.) As is the case among rank-and-file government employees, many junior BDF personnel support the opposition.

GROWING INTEREST IN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

¶9. (U) Mission Gaborone has encouraged the emergence of civil society organizations focused on security issues. Following the African Center for Security Studies (ACSS) annual conference held in Gaborone in June 2005, local alumni of the ACSS conferences established a Botswana chapter. Mission personnel have participated in the group's meetings and offered Mission assistance to generate momentum. A Mission representative also attended and made a presentation at a seminar hosted by the Center for Security Studies, a separate organization, located at the University of Botswana. Post is planning additional outreach activities with these organizations to encourage the further development of civilian oversight of the military.

VICE PRESIDENT KHAMA - WILDCARD

¶10. (C) Vice President (and retired Lt. General) Ian Khama plays a unique and important role in civil-military relations in Botswana. Although he has relinquished both his uniform and his earlier responsibilities as Minister overseeing the BDF, Khama remains closely tied to the armed forces. Most prominently, he occasionally pilots BDF helicopters for personal and official travel, with presidential authority but in apparent contravention of BDF regulations. His personal assistant, Col. Isaac Kgosi, is an active duty BDF officer seconded to the Office of the President. Perhaps most significantly for the future, although Khama's relationships with the current senior BDF leadership are reportedly strained, he is said to be well liked and respected among mid-level and junior officers. Current President Festus Mogae has stated that he plans to resign well in advance of the 2009 elections, which will automatically elevate Khama and give him the opportunity to lead the BDP into the vote as the sitting president.

¶11. (C) The media have associated the GOB's plans to establish an intelligence agency (currently the BDF and the Botswana Police Service have their own intelligence units)

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with the supposedly nefarious intentions of the Vice President. In the weeks following the October 2004 general elections, in which an opposition candidate won a council seat in Khama's constituency for the first time ever, reports emerged that police intelligence officers had investigated the councilor and questioned his supporters. Although these accusations were never confirmed, that incident has contributed to a sense of unease and suspicion among some about the role of such an organization. Opposition politicians and even some ruling party members have used this to publicly attack Khama. His infrequent participation in parliament and his open dislike for political debate give these detractors room to describe him as authoritarian or even potentially anti-democratic (reftel).

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Botswana's record of stability since independence has resulted in part from the BDP's continuous hold on power. In the last election, however, the opposition took a combined 48 percent of the vote; if it continues to gain popular support and can manage some unity, it will have its best chance ever to oust the BDP during the presidency of Ian Khama. His presidency will present some interesting challenges to civil-military relations in any event. If he

leads the BDP to another five-year mandate, he'll be closely watched to see how he handles his powerful role as commander in chief and how he manages his ties to the officer corps. Will he set aside more ministries for ex-military friends? If and when he and the BDP lose, though, the attention on him will truly be acute. Given his personal background, his popularity with the younger officer corps, and the wide constitutional powers held by the President, it is not unnatural to wonder how he and the military would react to the prospect of an opposition figure taking up the reins. How praetorian would Khama's relationship to the military prove to be, how strong his adherence to his father's vision of a democratic Botswana?

113. (C) The BDF's performance so far, and the evident support among its junior ranks for the opposition, argues very strongly against the likelihood of any possible military interference in the democratic process -- in fact, only the presence of Khama as President makes such a scenario even remotely plausible. However far-fetched the notion of Botswana's military stepping in to reject regime change may be, though, it is a perennial favorite topic for the opposition, students, and jaded Gaborone journalists. However his political fortunes may play out, Ian Khama seems certain to remain a wildcard figure for a long time to come.

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